

## The Subject: Universal, Particular and Individual

### **The subject is neither an individual nor a group but a relation**

The category of Subjectivity makes its appearance here as a logical category, specifically, the first division of the Notion. Subjectivity is a relation, and a relation which entails the consciousness of human beings. The Subject is the living being which is aware of that Subjectivity; that could be a person, aware of their own subjectivity, or it could be group of people, who share a conception and constitute it together. But rather than 'group', we should say a relation amongst people, since there should be no implication in the notion of subjectivity that people see themselves as a group or are, through the relevant subjectivity, seen by others as a group. The word 'subject' connotes an entity rather than a relation or activity. So we should reserve the word 'subject' for when that subjectivity is referred to itself and constitutes itself as a self-conscious entity. The word 'subjectivity', which is the word used by Hegel here in the Logic, then has the broader meaning, in connection with a shape of consciousness, which goes to constitute the mind of one or many human beings, but does not necessarily have the meaning of one or a group of human beings.

With these qualifications, the word 'Subject' can be used where perhaps it is more precise to use the word 'subjectivity', which is consistent with Hegel's usage, with Subject carrying the connotation of a subjectivity being a personage of some kind, an active agent in the development of a shape of consciousness. This understanding of the notion of 'subject' carries the *structuralist* understanding, in which a person can be the *carrier* of a shape of consciousness, without necessarily knowing themselves to be such a carrier. But to the extent that the Subject has *self*-consciousness, and to some extent shares in 'absolute knowledge', that is to say, the philosophical insight that the universal is an historically formed shape of consciousness in which they are a participant, and their subjectivity has its subsistence in that universal, does the Subject transcend this kind of unconscious agency. These are the distinctions which are dealt with in the *Phenomenology*.

This conception contrasts with Kant's usage in which a transcendental, individual subject uses their personal access to Reason and Experience to actively produce their own consciousness. Hegel's insight into the cultural and historical location of shapes of consciousness, transcends this individualism.

The abstract notion, or subject, is the first concept of the Doctrine of the Notion, which develops up to the Idea, the concrete whole of a form of social life. This first abstract concept which constitutes the starting point for a science is of crucial significance for Hegel. Finding the correct starting point and then allowing the concept to unfold itself by the method of immanent critique, demonstrating what lies within that simple concept constitutes the method of science; and the Logic forms the model for this method. In this case, the abstract notion or subject, which has arisen out of everything that has gone before, forms the starting point of the science of the Idea.

In that sense, just as the molecule is the 'unit of analysis' for chemistry, and the single cell the 'unit of analysis' for biology, the subject is the 'unit of analysis' for the study of *formations of consciousness*, that is to say, the simplest thing which demonstrates all the properties of the whole, the basic thought-object which constitutes the building block of social life.

As we have seen, the development leading up to the emergence of the Notion does not have the form of a transcendental subject which simply takes on attributes or a small concept which gets bigger and bigger. The Abstract Notion is itself the germ or prototype or *Urphänomenon* or embryo of a developed, concrete relation. What went before created the conditions of possibility of the notion, and asked the question, so to speak, but the positing of the Notion is a sharp break, something new. Prior to the emergence of the Notion we see every imaginable combination of other pre-existing notions in ultimately *failed* attempts to reflect what was emergent in Being. Like the judgment of Solomon, or a Declaration of Independence or the *Magna Carta*, the Notion emerges out of the throng of disputation and lays the basis for further development.

"It might perhaps seem that, in order to state the Notion of an object, the logical element were presupposed and that therefore this could not in turn have something else for its presupposition, nor be deduced; just as in geometry logical propositions as applied to magnitude and employed in that science, are premised in the form of axioms, determinations of cognition that have not been and cannot be deduced. Now although it is true that the Notion is to be regarded, not merely as a subjective presupposition but as the absolute foundation, yet it can be so only in so far as it has made itself the foundation. Abstract immediacy is no doubt a first; yet in so far as it is abstract it is, on the contrary mediated, and therefore if it is to be grasped in its truth its foundation must first be sought. Hence this foundation, though indeed an immediate, must have made itself immediate through the sublation of mediation." (Science of Logic §1279)

A Notion has from the very beginning three moments, Individual, Universal and Particular. Think of when a new word (*Universal*) is coined which becomes known to an (*Individual*) person who now coordinates their (*Particular*) activity with others having in mind the new word. The same kind of visualization works for the new judicial precedent, or programmatic declaration that initiates a social movement, a project of some kind, a new technical invention, and so on.

In the beginning these breakthroughs are abstract in the sense that they are untested, their implications are yet to unfold and even those participating through their action in the new relation may not be fully committed to the new idea, which might disappear tomorrow. The new abstract Notion takes its place amidst other competing Notions, and only by merging with those other notions can an abstract, new Notion concretize itself.

### **The subject is the truth of being and essence**

Hegel says:

*“Thus the Notion is the truth of Being and Essence, inasmuch as the shining or show of self-reflection is itself at the same time independent immediacy, and this being of a different actuality is immediately only a shining or show on itself.” (Shorter Logic §159)*

After the whole series of failed projects, chimeras, false dawns and disappointments which constitute the pre-history of a thing, the various efforts of an emergent form of social practice to understand itself and find a form in which its content can be fruitfully developed, eventually this self-same material, the material of reflection, gives birth to something that does not pass away, something permanent, something which does not flee at the first sign of enemy fire or disintegrate in internal dissension, but actually absorbs fire and grows stronger from internal debate. But its material is gathered from reflection, so in that sense it is the truth of Essence.

The Notion is the truth of Being in a double sense, since Essence is already the truth of Being. But also, as the reflected form of Being which does not pass away and proves to be persistent, it is in that sense the truth of Being, it's what Being turned out to be.

The Notion is both immediate and mediated. It is mediated because it is the outcome of a protracted process of reflection and is itself a form of reflection, but it is also given sensuously and immediately.

So this takes us back to the conception first formulated by Hegel in his early 1802-03 manuscripts, *System of Ethical Life*, of the Idea as the unity of Intuition and Concept. The new Notion is perceived in the same way as any other thing, *sensuously*. Given that we live (predominantly) in a 'second nature' made up of artefacts, every thing in this world interconnects with other things, finds its use in relation to other things and through the cooperative activity of people using elements of the culture, all of them given to us immediately, in Intuition or sensation. At the same time, as we have seen, the Notion is a *product of thought* and exists only insofar as it is meaningful. The claim that the Idea is the unity of Intuition and Concept is reproduced in the claim that the Notion is the unity of Being and Essence.

Subjectivity throws Being into a new light. It is not that what was only sensuous perception becomes conceptual, Being is always *theory laden*. There is no such thing as Pure Being, that is, immediacy which is not also at the same time mediated. But Subjectivity throws Being into a new light. Being is the same but not the same. Likewise, the contradictory series of determinations in Essence is made sense of from the standpoint of Subjectivity, which has sublated all the contradiction that led up to its emergence.

The Doctrine of the Notion is made up of Subject, Object and Idea. The Idea is the unity of Subject and Object, the process in which the objectification or institutionalization of the Subject continues to drive the development of the active and living subject. This development of the Subject itself, the inner development of the subject which continues within and alongside its objectification, has the form of the movement towards an all-round developed relation between individual, universal and particular. For the moment, we will just be concerned with the inner development of the Subject, or Notion; later we will turn to the development of the Subject-Object relation.

### **The concept is the identity of the individual, universal and particular**

Hegel's exposition of the three moments of the Notion and their relations is obscure in the extreme. Let us take look first at the Universal Notion:

*"The universal ... is that simplicity which, because it is the Notion, no less possesses within itself the richest content. First, therefore, it is the simple*

relation to itself; it is only *within itself*. Secondly, however, this identity is *within itself* absolute *mediation*, but it is not something *mediated*.” (*Science of Logic* §1327)

The universal is given to us by a word or symbol or tool or body shape or whatever which represents the Notion – “in free equality with itself in its specific character” (*Shorter Logic* §163). It is simple and immediate because in it as such there is no relation, no activity entailed in it, without particularity and without individuality. But the entire content is implicit, in that as part of a language or other culturally constructed system of meanings or its potential connection with other universal forms in some particular system of activity, in which it shows itself to be meaningful, in fact, the very carrier of meaning. It is absolute mediation as on its own it is just a dead thing, like a word from the language of a long lost civilization, and the mediation is entirely within itself; it is what it is independently of its use or presentation by any person, but as such it is a nothing. Take a word out of its language and the context of its use by people and it is nothing, but the meaning is still there, implicitly; it is like the unknown lock which can be opened by a key found on the road. As Universal Notion, it is eternal, it is that which is instantiated in every particular.

The Universal Notion is *not* to be understood as a contingent attribute uniting an otherwise arbitrary set of objects, as in set theory, but as a *self-subsistent genus*.

Hegel likened the first, abstract Universal, Particular and Individual Notions to the first moments of reflection:

“Universality, particularity, and individuality are, taken in the abstract, the same as identity, difference, and ground. But the universal is the self-identical, with the express qualification, that it simultaneously contains the particular and the individual. Again, the particular is the different or the specific character, but with the qualification that it is in itself universal and is as an individual. Similarly the individual must be understood to be a subject or substratum, which involves the genus and species in itself and possesses a substantial existence.” (*Shorter Logic* §164)

In the simplest formal terms, the universal is a unique genus or quality, the particular is the specification of the genus with any number of qualifications up to the point of limiting the category to a single instance, and the individual is just one concrete instance. But Hegel does a great deal with this relationship.

In the above, he points out that the universal “contains” the particular and individual, i.e., a *concrete* universal cannot have an existence separate from its

instantiation in particular individuals; that in successive instantiations, while the universal is always just as it is, the particular is always different and in fact it is the specific difference which makes it a particular; that the particular is always nothing other than individuals, not something side by side with individuals; the individual is individual in the sense of the ancient conception of a substratum to which indefinitely *many* predicates inhere; and the individual is ground, because it is the only substratum in which the universal can be manifested and developed. The category of Ground is given in the maxim “Everything has its sufficient ground.” If we ask how the Particular is a Particular *of* a given Universal, then the ground ultimately lies in the Individual.

As an intermediary between the formal syllogistic relation and the meaning of these relations in terms of formations of consciousness it is useful to take the Universal, Particular and Individual as designating a social movement or formal organisation, as an example of a self-constituting universal, a social practice performed by individuals organised around an ideal. The principle is the Universal, the Particular is the different groups and activities expressing the principle in different times and places and the Individual is the individual people executing these activities, belonging to different social groups constituting the movement and thinking with the relevant universal conceptions.

In these terms the Universal is the word or name or shapes by which the movement is recognised and represented, the banner around which people rally. The Particular is the different instantiations of the movement, the branches, groups, events and so forth only in and through which can a movement be said to exist; and the Individual, a person participating in the movement through the various particular instantiations of it. In this realization of the idea, the movement is the Notion, and as such it must have a name or some kind of representation or definition (Universal), there must be Particular groups adhering to this name or principle, and those Particular groups must have Individual members or adherents who know themselves to be adhering to a Particular group instantiating the given Universal.

For example, an advocate of the principle of solidarity, for example, a writer perhaps, who purely and simply *expounds* the idea of solidarity without seeing the need to actually set up groups, campaigns, unions and so forth or make the effort to mobilise and win over individuals to the idea, can be said to take as their motto: “The Universal is Absolute.”

On the other hand, the frenetic, full-time activist who sets up campaigns, self-help groups, parties and so on, without bothering about how each of these endeavours furthers the now long-forgotten reason for it all, can be said to take as their maxim: “The Particular is Absolute.”

And finally, the advocate of People Power and public opinion, who has no confidence in ideology or parties and institutions, can be said to take as their rule: "The Individual is Absolute."

Every movement has these characters in their ranks and their role is almost obligatory. All of these claims have an element of truth. But if followed one-sidedly obviously they lead nowhere, because they are all *abstract*; but they are the three essential modes of existence of an idea.

The second section of Subjectivity presents a series of *Judgments* in which one of the moments is joined to the subject in a Judgment which comes successively closer to a Notion of it. The third section of Subjectivity presents a series of *Syllogisms*, in which a Judgment is mediated by one of the moments, which express the Subject more or less defectively, but get closer and closer to the Notion. There are about 12 Judgments and 10 Syllogisms, and we will only touch here on the most prominent points in the development.

The Judgments reproduce at a higher level the categories of Being and Essence, and are the Qualitative Judgment, the Judgment of Reflection, the Judgment of Necessity and the Judgment of Notion. Each of the Judgments expresses only partially what it is that brings something under the Notion, each Judgment is a successively more concrete characterization of the subject as it becomes clear. This process of judgments is the registering in self-consciousness of the process unfolding in the Objective Logic and therefore recapitulates the categories of Essence in the form of more and more adequate notions, but at this stage, still notions which are one-sided and deficient.

(a) In the *Qualitative Judgment*, the subject is ascribed a single quality, the relevant social practice is said to be good or bad, or novel or whatever. Hegel presents a logical critique of any such judgment, hinging around the point that equating an individual with a particular is faulty.

(b) In the Judgment of Reflection, the subject is given in connection with other things, so that it is not just seen as having some quality, but as having a place in a system of social practice, connected with other practices, of being useful for something, or whatever.

(c) In the *Judgment of Necessity* the subject is taken under its genus, rather than just as sharing with others a contingent property but belonging to some living whole.

(d) In the Judgment of the Notion, these three judgments are brought together. Hegel gives the following example:

“This (*the immediate individuality*) house (*the genus*), being so and so constituted (*particularity*), is good or bad. This is the Apodeictic judgment. All things are a genus (i.e. have a meaning and purpose) in an *individual* actuality of a *particular* constitution. And they are finite, because the particular in them may and also may not conform to the universal.”  
(*Shorter Logic* §179)

This most developed Judgment has risen to a concreteness where individual, universal and particular are brought together in characterizing the thing. In the case of each of these judgments, which are after all just making *one* judgment in relation to some form of social practice, Hegel demonstrates the deficiency of the Judgment, its limitations. This demonstrates the action of sceptical critique as an existing formation of consciousness which is not yet fully conscious of itself, tries to define itself: no it's not this or that quality, or just this or that connection with other things, and it may be this kind of thing, but that doesn't exhaust what it is, and so on. All these deficient judgments are reflected in one-sided forms of practice, that are still guided by conceptions reflecting the fact that the specific character of the relevant social practice has not been fully grasped, or in taking up a social position which obstructs the development of the notion. For example, people acting in relation to the thing taking account of just one attribute (that the event was amateurish, for example) or in terms of its relation to other social practices (that it was unofficial, for example), but eventually the individual, particular and universal aspects of the thing are brought together with a recognition of the thing (that this is a spontaneous protest by new recruits, for example).

### **Each moment mediates between the other two**

The next level of development of the Subject involves bringing all three moments, individual, universal and particular, into proper relation, and Hegel calls these three-way relations Syllogisms. The form taken by these Syllogisms is that of a judgment mediated by one of the three moments of the Notion. As with the judgments, each of these syllogisms is deficient in some way and open to criticism. Only when all the different possible combinations are brought together and concentrated in a single syllogism which gives weight to every aspect of the relation between Individual, Particular and Universal, may the conception “capture the notion.”

Like the Judgments, the Syllogisms also reproduce the categories of Essence: the Qualitative (or Immediate) Syllogism, the Syllogism of Reflection and the Syllogism of Necessity. Each Syllogism unites the Universal, Individual or Particular Notion, with a Judgment.



The first *Immediate Syllogism* is the *determinate syllogism* (I-P-U), in which the Individual is brought under a Universal by virtue of coming under a Particular. This is the most straight forward and immediate of syllogisms. The deficiency arises from the fact that the individual's relation to the Universal may be fortuitous, as the individual is only participating in the Universal by virtue of one Particular.

"He's got such a nice way with people; he'd make a good politician."

The second Immediate Syllogism is the *Qualitative syllogism* (P-I-U), in which a particular is subsumed under the Universal only because one of its individuals are under the Universal. This is an obviously incomplete claim as other individuals are excluded from consideration. There are altogether four such Qualitative Syllogisms.

"I'd never let an Indian doctor operate on me; look at that Dr. Patel."

Hegel says that the Qualitative Syllogisms deal with Particularity abstractly, whereas the Syllogism of Reflection extends this abstractness to encompass all Individuals. So we have the syllogism of allness (also I-P-U), that an individual which is under a particularity comes under the universal because all individuals under that particularity come under the universal. The deficit is that the major premise (that all such individuals comes under the universal) depends on the conclusion, namely that the individual in question comes under the particular.

"You can't tell me you're a footballer! You're only 5'6" and no footballer is that short!"

The second Syllogism of Reflection is the *syllogism of induction* (U-I-P), deduces the universal from the particular, because all the particular individuals come under the universal, the deficit of which is that the particular is never complete, and does not cover *all* possible individuals.

"There's more and more crime nowadays; you hear about a murder almost everyday on TV."

The third Syllogism of Reflection is the *syllogism of analogy* (I-U-P), lifts an individual to the status of a universal and deduces from a particularity of one individual to another similar, but the similarity may not be such as to justify the analogy.

"Vietnam has proved that a small country defending its territory can defeat the USA; it's only a matter of time in Iraq."

In each Syllogism of Reflection, an effort was made to make a generalization based on incomplete information, leading to unsafe conclusions. The next and third category of Syllogism are the *Syllogisms of Necessity*, in which this limitation is to be overcome.

The first Syllogism of Necessity is the *categorical syllogism* (I-U-P), and here instead of an arbitrary character of an individual, which may or may not unite it with another individual, being taken up, the genus which concretely unites it with other individuals is the middle term. The deficit of this syllogism is that even though particularity of an individual is deduced from its genus, without having a Notion of the genus the syllogism is still open to error.

“He’s a professor of neuroscience; he must know what consciousness is.”

The second Syllogism of Necessity is the *hypothetical syllogism*, A implies B, A is, therefore B is. But in this B has its existence in B and the conditions which made A necessary are not necessarily the same conditions which make B follow from A. The deficit in the syllogism is therefore that the necessity of B must be known in itself, not mediately through A.

“The fuel gauge says we’re half full; we can’t have run out of petrol.”

And so on. We can all recognise these one-sided lines of argument; in every case they fail because they have not yet grasped the relevant *notion*, but it is only in and through such deficient judgments that which prove in practice to be deficient, that the notion consolidates itself and becomes a fact, not the outcome of a line of argument, but an objective fact.

### **Hegel presents the Subject as a critique of formal logic**

We should remind ourselves at this point of the basic thesis of the *Phenomenology*: that formations of consciousness have to re-examine their basic rationale whenever their way of life is called into question. So in this section, Hegel has looked at how a range of seemingly justified statements may fail the test of logical examination. All the syllogisms he examines are deficient, but nonetheless, we see a positive outcome, in the form of a developed notion.

The same thing happens in the sphere of social practice; every judgment mentioned earlier, including the syllogistic judgments, is a proposition which is meaningful only if it is expressed in practical activity. So the formal logical critique mirrors a practical

critique, manifested in incremental change to forms of activity as well as subjective consciousness.

The concretization of the Concept takes place through objectification and further development which happens through the development of both subject and object together, and the sublation of relatively abstract notions by more and more concrete notions, that incorporate into themselves a wider and wider sphere of social life. This subject-object development, where a formation of consciousness develops through the embedding of a new concept into every aspect of life is called the Idea.

It can be helpful in understanding this part of Hegel's Logic to take a voluntary organisation as the relevant social practice or concept, with the policies and principles written into the organisation's constitution and rules and the leadership body responsible for carriage of these principles understood as the Universal, the various occupational, geographical or whatever branches or sections of the organisation taken as the Particular, and the members, whether rank-and-file or officials, as Individual. This is a valid concretization of the idea of a Subject in the sense considered in the Logic, suffering only from the deficit of being overly formal and mechanical. With this analogy, which is somewhat more than an analogy, the notions, judgments and syllogisms of the section on Subjectivity, render themselves as typical of the forms of consciousness encountered within such formal organisations.

Lenin's insistence in 1901 that to be a member of the Party an individual had to participate in one of the Party's branches or activities is rational in this light. One-sided claims like an organisation is only as good as its members, forgetting the necessary mediating role of branch and national leadership are seen to be partial truths. On the other hand, the idea that individual members might have a say in the appointment of district officials certainly deserved more consideration than it received at the time. Or the idea that an individual delegate should represent their own branch or electorate when participating in debates on national policy. A mature organisation which has undergone the complete development of Subjectivity which Hegel envisages here must fully develop the mediating role of branches and sections in the relation between the leadership and membership; national leaders must take a close interest in representing the views and interests of ordinary members in relation to the particular interests of branch officials, and local officials are diligent and well-informed in conveying national policies and issues to the membership, and so on and so forth. Each of these demands for the development of a mature social formation can be expressed in the form of the criticism of a Syllogism. Full development means that every imaginable form of mediation between Individual, Particular and Universal is developed. As a result, the

thinking of individuals participating in such a formation of consciousness, thinking formed and expressed through participation in relevant organisations and relations, may be mature and rounded and avoid one-sidedness, such as particularism, elitism, dogmatism, activism and so on.

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